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United States Congressional Leaders
VIA EMAIL

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

RE: Support of S.3607, Safeguarding America's First Responders Act of 2020

As the chief law enforcement officer of our state, I join other leaders and members of Utah's law enforcement community, including those from the Utah Fraternal Order of Police, Utah Peace Officers Association, Utah Sheriffs Association, and Utah Chiefs of Police Association, to encourage the House of Representatives to swiftly enact S.3607, the Safeguarding America's First Responders Act of 2020 ("SAFR").

While I have already signed a letter similar to this one with my state attorney general colleagues from across America, the voices I join today in this letter represent many of the best men and women in law enforcement from the great State of Utah. And, collectively, we felt compelled to make our voices heard, particularly for families of our fallen brothers and sisters in uniform, past and future. We acknowledge the United States Senate's rapid passing of the bill and urge similar exigency by the House.

Our public safety officers risk their lives every day to keep us safe. The COVID-19 pandemic has made their sacrifice clearer. As public safety officers in many states have battled the COVID-19 pandemic, they have put themselves at risk while most Americans were able to stay home.

When public safety officers are called to respond, they do not know whether they are encountering a person who is positive for COVID-19. We have seen harrowing stories about how public safety officers have taken heroic actions to save the lives of others, knowing that they risked infection in doing so.

As Tampa Police Chief Brian Dugan said, "There's no way for a police officer to do their job and not potentially be exposed to the virus."

And sadly, in many states, first responders have lost their lives to COVID-19.

Washington Post, "Police in several cities test positive for coronavirus, stirring fears of spread among first responders", (March 28, 2020).

When a public safety officer loses their life in the line of duty, there are often many benefits available to their families. Federal law currently provides for the Public Safety Officers Benefits Program, administered by the Justice Department, which provides death benefits to survivors of police officers and first responders who perish in the line of duty or as the result of a work-related event.

The program requires evidence linking deaths caused by an infectious disease to work-related activity. In many cases, the origin of an infection can be easily identified, but determining where and when someone contracts COVID-19 in the midst of a global pandemic presents a unique challenge. Inevitable human contact while off duty and delayed manifestation of the disease also presents risk and stress for the families of our public safety officers, another challenge they should not have to endure.

SAFR works to overcome this challenge by establishing a temporary presumption that COVID-19 infections will be contracted while on duty if diagnosed within 45 days of an officer's last shift. The legislation ensures that families of officers and first responders lost while fighting the pandemic do not face unnecessary barriers to benefits, they have already been promised.

While Utah, to date, has been spared the tragedy of losing a peace officer to COVID-19, we may well face that reality in the near future and would prefer Utah families of fallen officers, as well as those across America, not have to wait for further deaths in order to simplify this important process.

We urge your swift action to pass this deeply humane and vital legislation.

Sincerely,



Sean D. Reyes
Utah Attorney General

Chief Gary Giles
Utah Chiefs of Police

Sheriff Nathan J. Curtis
Utah Sheriffs' Association

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CC Rep. Chris Stewart
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Sen. Mike Lee
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